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SUBJECT: SERBIA: PARTIES' IDEOLOGIES GIVE WAY TO "MATHEMATICAL
REALITIES"

REF: 08 BELGRADE 275, 08 BELGRADE 273

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Summary

11. (SBU) Leaders of Prime Minister Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia and failed presidential candidate Nikolic's Radicals are openly discussing a likely post election coalition. President Tadic's Democratic Party has apparently seeks to keep all post election options open, though increasingly a coalition with the Socialists may be the most viable. The Liberal Democrat Party says it will not join, but would support a Democrat-Socialist coalition, if needed. In this campaign, parties are ditching ideology and considering mathematical realities needed for any future coalition government. We believe this may blur the sharp distinctions between the two major blocs, and confuse voters. End Summary.

DSS Predictions

12. (SBU) Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) should win enough seats to be viable partner in a post election coalition, DSS Vice President Milos Aligrudic predicted. In a March 19 meeting with the DCM, Aligrudic said that the DSS coalition would win between 10-11% of the vote, yielding them around 30 seats which was "not much, but we must be realistic." The Democratic Party (DS) coalition "may win 40%" and the Radicals (SRS) would win 37%, he predicted. Aligrudic was not sure the Socialists (SPS) would make the 5% threshold, and he thought the DSS would pick up a few more seats if the SPS failed to win seats. Aligrudic thought the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) would definitely not win 5%, the threshold for a non-minority party to enter the parliament.

Possible SRS-DSS Coalition

13. (SBU) The natural outcome, Aligrudic said, was a DSS-SRS government. The DCM raised the tragic irony of the DSS, led by Kostunica who was the face of the anti-Milosevic movement in October 2000 joining forces with a Milosevic relic. Aligrudic said the DSS alliance with SRS was "risky" and he understood the Radicals were "not our friends," but said that the DSS had to consider "mathematical realities" and shared Kosovo policy. Now that the DS had shown it was "willing to give up Kosovo" for EU membership, any DSS-DS alliance would be "too unstable" to function. Saying there was "free media" and "free elections" in Serbia, Aligrudic said it would be up to the people to decide whether to support DSS policy on Kosovo and the EU.

14. (U) The Radicals have also opened the door for a coalition with the DSS, possibly even with Kostunica as prime minister. In March 28 interview with daily Vecernje Novosti, Radical Party (SRS) vice president Tomislav Nikolic reversed earlier comments and said Kostunica could lead a DSS-SRS government because there is "virtually no difference" between the parties' political programs. Nikolic said the SRS will likely offer coalition to Kostunica's DSS even if the SRS has more votes because "everything is possible" in politics. Nikolic said his party is opposed to signing an SAA with the EU unless EU countries which have recognized Kosovo withdraw those decisions. Nikolic added that Serbia will never join NATO.

DS: Slow to Start and Wanting Options

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15. (SBU) Marko Djuriscic, Member of the DS Presidency, said DS hoped to begin its campaign around April 5. DS Advisor Ivan Vejvoda told the Ambassador on March 28 that Defense Minister Sutanovac had emerged as the leader of the campaign. Djuriscic said one reason for the slow campaign start was a split within the DS as to who the party should choose for its potential prime minister candidate and whether the party should publicly announce that person at the start of the campaign. Djuriscic said DS was hoping both SPS and LDP would cross the threshold, but realized both could be in danger of not reaching 5%. He said having both LDP and SPS in parliament "would give DS options to form a government." He was willing to point out, however, that personally he would prefer to see another DS-DSS coalition government, "but this time without Kostunica as Prime Minister." He recognized, at this stage, such a coalition would be, "a distant reality."

Possible DS-SPS Coalition

15. (SBU) Analysts and contacts are starkly divided on the possibility of a DS-SPS government. Publicly, the Socialists have denied such a possibility, but Belgrade is abuzz with talk of a backroom deal between the parties. Leon Kojen, former advisor to Tadic and Kosovo negotiator, told poloff on March 20 that the DS would "certainly try" to make SPS leader Ivica Dacic an offer. Kojen pointed out that Tadic advisor Miki Rakic and Dacic are originally from the same village and "there is a connection there." (One should be careful of Kojen's judgments,

as he has offered himself as a potential foreign minister to the Radicals.) Many contacts report that Dacic and some SPS members want to transform the party from the Milosevic era hardline nationalist, pensioner party to an acceptable social democratic grouping. DS, a member of the Socialist International, could open the door for the SPS to join that organization as part of this transformation.

16. (SBU) Nenad Canak, leader of the Vojvodina League of Social Democrats (LSV) and member of Tadic's DS coalition told the DCM on March 21 that he recently talked with Dacic, whom he cast as a "political businessman, buying and selling votes." Dacic reportedly said to Canak: "I don't give a damn about Milosevic, but I can't say that publicly otherwise I give up my electorate." He also said Dacic was starting to talk more about Serbia's EU future. Novi Sad Mayor and former Radical Maja Gojkovic told the DCM on March 21 that she saw no issue with Dacic distancing himself and the party from Milosevic: "Dacic was 16 when Milosevic was in power. I see no problem with change, or not identifying with Milosevic," she said. She thought a pro-EU integration stand was a good thing for the Socialists and good for Serbia. "You can be married, divorce, and marry again. People can change. I didn't want to wear the young pioneers red scarf when Tito was in power but I did," she said.

17. (SBU) Political party observers remain skeptical. Canak told the DCM that a DS-SPS deal was impossible. On whether Socialists could ever become a pro-European force and join a coalition, Canak said they would not be good partners (as they were mainly elderly, Milosevic sympathizers, devoid of a youth movement) but said they were still "professional politicians" who wanted to be in power. Nevertheless, Canak said, there was "no chance" of a DS-SPS coalition although Tadic would make "pragmatic" efforts to try. However, Kojen said that Dacic lacked the control over his party that Kostunica, Tadic or LDP's Cedomir Jovanovic enjoyed, and would not be able to make the deal. Similarly, Aligrudic dismissed talk of a DS-SPS coalition to the DCM, saying that Dacic would not be able to convince his supporters to make such a move. "It would be his last act" as SPS leader, Aligrudic said.

LDP: Would Not Join SPS-DS Coalition But Would Support It

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18. (SBU) Zoran Ostojic, Member of the LDP Presidency, told poloff on March 26 that the party was confident it would clear the 5% threshold, saying he thought LDP could get "6, 7 or maybe even 8%" of the vote. Ostojic thought it was probable DS would try to form a coalition with the SPS, since LDP would not be sufficient for a government coalition. If the DS had the mandate to form a new government, and it chose a coalition with SPS, LDP would not join the government, but would give it minority support, Ostojic said. He said, however, that LDP's continued support would be contingent upon DS meeting certain timelines, such as handing over of Mladic to ICTY. Ostojic said LDP would not put other requests "or blackmail" on the DS to form a government.

Comment

19. (SBU) In the upcoming parliamentary elections, mathematical reality will trump ideology. There is no better proof of this than the fact that the two possible governing coalitions that will emerge from the election results. One will pair the face of the October 2000 democratic revolution (Kostunica's DSS) with Milosevic's political creation (Seselj's Radicals). The other means a coalition between the flagship of the anti-Milosevic Democratic Opposition (Tadic's DS) with Milosevic's own party. No matter how much each party will try to spin the ideological basis for their alliances to their supporters and the international community, the cold, hard math dictates one of these two coalitions will be necessary to form a new government.

While this parlor game of counting parliamentary seats has energized the political class, the voters are less likely to be so excited. The clean distinction between Tadic's message of a European future and Nikolic's yearning for justice for transition's losers may be lost as parties line up for the May 11 showdown. This is a pity, considering what is at stake in post-Kosovo Serbia: programs and policies, not personalities, should be in the spotlight. End Comment.

MUNTER